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ABSTRACT

This booklet reports on the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in U.S. History for 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students. The booklet contains the following sections: (1) Why We Assess History; (2) Preparing the 1994 NAEP U.S. History Assessment; (3) What is NAEP? (4) Creating a Framework for the U.S. History Assessment, with What the NAEP U.S. History Assessment Examines, Basic Assumptions, Content and Design, and Elements of the Framework; (5) Sample of Illustrative Examples from Periods 2 and 6; (6) What is NAGB? (7) Attributes of the 1994 History Assessment; and (8) Special Study. (EH)

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Why We Assess History

The success of a democratic country such as ours depends on the active participation of citizens and voters. If students are to become knowledgeable citizens, they need to know how their Nation became what it is. The study of history satisfies this need. The understanding it provides helps to ensure that students will make positive contributions in shaping America's future.

This notion was first emphasized in 1990 with the adoption of the National Education Goals, and subsequently with the 1994 passage of the Goals 2000 legislation. Goal 3 guarantees history a prominent place in the school curriculum. It states that "By the year 2000, all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography..."

The capability of students increases with the study of history. They learn about ideas and people—individuals and groups, leaders and followers. They acquire an understanding of how the present is the result of the choices people have made and the convictions they have held. They become knowledgeable about the diverse cultural heritage of this Nation and about the world community. The study of history:

- Identifies enduring themes that link people and events across time and space.
- Provides exposure to all kinds of human thought and activity—political, social, cultural, economic, technological, philosophical, and religious—and the interactions among them.
- Provides opportunities to (a) analyze change and continuity over time, (b) explore the range of options that have been available to people, and (c) examine the possibility that historical outcomes would have been different if different options had been selected.
- Exposes the range, depth, and differing perspectives of the human experience.
- Enhances the ability to probe the moral and ethical dimensions of decisions and to appreciate the consequences of particular choices.
- Introduces the places where human actions occur.
- Requires the development of historical reasoning skills based upon the examination of evidence, the analysis of cause and effect, and appreciation of how complex and sometimes ambiguous the explanation of historical events can be.

In addition to active, informed citizens and voters, the goals for history must include the development of high standards of achievement for all students and methods for evaluating progress toward them. This is the purpose of the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in U.S. History.

What Is NAEP?

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the "Nation's Report Card," is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various academic subjects. Since 1969, NAEP assessments have been conducted on a national sample of students in the areas of reading, mathematics, science, writing, and other fields. By making objective information on student performance available to policymakers, educators, and the general public, NAEP is an integral part of our Nation's evaluation of the condition and progress of education.

NAEP is a congressionally mandated project of the National Center for Education Statistics, U. S. Department of Education. Results are provided only for group performance. NAEP is forbidden by law to report data on individuals.

In 1990, Congress authorized NAEP to collect comparable State-by-State results for the first time on a voluntary trial basis, in eighth grade mathematics. State-level assessments have since taken place in 1992, 1994, and are planned for 1996. Over 40 States, the District of Columbia, and several territories have volunteered to take part in the State NAEP assessments.

Preparing the 1994 NAEP U.S. History Assessment

The process of preparing the 1994 NAEP U.S. History Assessment began in the fall of 1991 in the midst of heated debate concerning how to improve the teaching of history. It could not have been a better time to develop a national consensus on *what* to assess and *how* to assess student performance in U.S. History. The result is an assessment that:

- Continues and extends the 1988 NAEP Assessment's goal of fostering an integrated understanding of political, social, cultural, and intellectual factors in American history.
- Includes a greater variety of ways both to measure student performance and to place people and events in proper historical contexts.
- Anticipates a movement in the teaching of history (a) toward an understanding of the multiple experiences and perspectives of the Nation's diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups and (b) toward a greater appreciation of such topics as the role of religion and science in American life.

Creating a Framework for the U.S. History Assessment

The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) developed the Framework for the 1994 NAEP U.S. History Assessment through a national consensus process that was carried out under contract by the Council of Chief State School Officers and several professional organizations. It evokes a rich and inclusive history of our complex Nation.

What the NAEP U.S. History Assessment Examines

The Framework reflects NAGB's conviction that any broadly acceptable examination in history must be a careful balance between what is commonly taught and learned and what ought to be grasped by our students. In addition, it must provide a balance between:

- Common and conflicting strands that formed one Nation from many States and groups and gave life to its motto, *E Pluribus Unum*.
- Positive accomplishments and worrisome problems in achieving desired goals.
- The need for knowledge of specific dates and facts and the need for developing concepts, generalizations, and intellectual skills.

Basic Assumptions

The Steering and Planning Committees—composed of educators and public members—began with seven basic assumptions in developing the Framework for the 1994 Assessment of U.S. history in elementary, middle, and high schools:

(1) Historical study should connect people and events across time and include all kinds of human thought and activity.

(2) The study of U.S. history must analyze change and continuity over time, explore the range of choices that have been available to people, and examine the possibility that historical outcomes could have been different, depending upon the options selected.

(3) Historical study should include famous people and ordinary individuals and events on the grand scale and in everyday life to convey the ideas and experiences that have shaped U.S. history.

What Is NAGB?

In 1988 the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) was created by Congress to set policy for NAEP. The independent, 26-member Board is composed of State and local policymakers, teachers and curriculum specialists, testing experts, business representatives, and members of the general public.

The Board is responsible for selecting subject areas to be assessed and for determining appropriate achievement goals for each grade and subject tested. NAGB has responsibility for developing test objectives and specifications, designing guidelines for reporting and disseminating results, and improving the form and use of the assessment. The Board also is charged with ensuring that all items selected for use in NAEP are free from racial, cultural, or regional bias.

(4) History should include analytical study of the Nation's political ideals of individual dignity, individual rights, civic virtue, democracy, the rule of law, equality of opportunity, liberty, popular sovereignty, justice, and the right to dissent.

(5) History has a spatial dimension—the places where human actions occur.

(6) Enduring themes that link people and events across time and space must be identified.

(7) The use of themes to relate particular facts requires that learners develop historical reasoning skills based upon the examination of evidence, the analysis of cause and effect, and appreciation of how complex and sometimes ambiguous the explanation of historical events can be.

Content and Design

The content Framework has three components: (1) Themes in U.S. History; (2) Periods of U.S. History; and (3) Ways of Knowing and Thinking About U.S. History.

The Framework is designed around four historical themes and eight periods of U.S. history. The four themes make up the central focus of the assessment and are defined through general questions that form the context for the people, events, ideas, movements, issues, and sources to be addressed in each historical period. The emphasis given to each theme depends upon the major historical issues and developments of that period.

Themes in U.S. History

Theme 1: Change and continuity in American democracy. The development of American political democracy—its ideas, institutions, practices, and controversies—from colonial times to the present. This theme includes basic principles and core civic ideas developed through the American Revolution, U.S. Constitution, and Civil War and the struggles over slavery and civil rights.

Theme 2: The gathering and interactions of peoples, cultures, and ideas. The gathering of people and cultures of many countries, races, and religious traditions that have contributed to the American heritage and the development of American society.

Theme 3: Economic and technological changes and their relation to society, ideas, and the environment. The transformation of the American economy from rural frontier to industrial superpower, and its impact on society, ideas, and the environment. This topic includes (a) the development of business, (b) labor and the impact of science and technology, (c) a market economy, (d) urbanization, and (e) geography.

Theme 4: The changing role of America in the world. The movement from isolation to worldwide responsibility. This subject matter includes (1) the impact of geography, resources, interests, and ideals on American foreign policy; (2) relations between domestic politics and foreign affairs; and (3) the influence of the American example and specific policies on the rest of the world and other nations' influence on the United States.

Periods of U.S. History

Eight periods of history are categorized in the 1994 Framework. They establish a chronological structure to trace, reconstruct, and connect historical experiences. The content and emphasis for each period are established by specific questions that relate directly to the historical themes. The eight periods of history are:

(1) Three Worlds and Their Meeting in the Americas (Beginnings to 1607)

(2) Colonization, Settlement, and Communities (1607 to 1763)

(3) The Revolution and the New Nation (1763 to 1815)

(4) Expansion and Reform (1801 to 1861)

(5) Crisis of the Union: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850 to 1877)

(6) The Development of Modern America (1865 to 1920)

(7) Modern America and the World Wars (1914 to 1945)

(8) Contemporary America (1945 to present)

Ways of Knowing and Thinking About U.S. History

An essential element of studying history lies in developing special ways of knowing and thinking that require students to utilize both lower and higher order cognitive skills, such as recall, analysis, judgment, application, and evaluation. The two domains of knowing and thinking about history in the 1994 Assessment are described as:

Historical Knowledge and Perspective. Knowing and understanding people, events, concepts, themes, movements, contexts, and historical sources; the sequencing of events; recognizing multiple perspectives and seeing an era or movement through the eyes of different groups; and developing a general conceptualization of U.S. history.

Sample of Illustrative Examples From Periods 2 and 6

Period 2. Colonization, Settlement, and Communities (1607 to 1763)

Theme 2: The Gathering and Interactions of Peoples, Cultures, and Ideas

Illustrative Examples

4th Grade:
- Show the locations of European settlements—Jamestown, Plymouth, Santa Fe—in North America.
- Write stories about everyday life and ordinary people in European settlements and Native American communities.

8th Grade:
- Explain why Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson left Massachusetts Bay, and compare their reasons with the original reasons for establishing the colony.
- Summarize the hardships of the middle passage from descriptions and diagrams of ships.

12th Grade:
- Compare the daily life of merchants, Native Americans, and yeoman farmers in colonial Massachusetts.
- Weigh evidence from primary and secondary sources to reach conclusions about the influence of Puritanism on developing social and religious life in America.

Period 6. The Development of Modern America (1865 to 1920)

Theme 3: Economic and Technological Changes and Their Relation to Society, Ideas, and the Environment

Illustrative Examples

4th Grade:
- Evaluate how inventions such as the electric light bulb, telephone, automobile, and elevator changed American life.
- Develop a list of the positive and negative results of industrialization.

8th Grade:
- Define laissez-faire capitalism and relate the term to the American economy.
- Relate such leaders as J.P. Morgan, Thomas Edison, Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and Samuel Gompers to the growth of big business and labor in America.

12th Grade:
- Define the free enterprise system and evaluate the influence of this economic concept on the development of the American economy.
- Discuss the rise of labor and explain the economic goals of the American Federation of Labor.

Historical Analysis and Interpretation. Explaining issues, identifying historical patterns, establishing cause-and-effect relationships, finding value statements, establishing significance, applying historical knowledge, weighing evidence to draw sound conclusions, making defensible generalizations, and rendering insightful accounts of the past.

Elements of the Framework

Questions posed for each theme and the specific questions developed for each period define a conceptual approach to U.S. history. The Steering and Planning Committees developed the questions as a way to think about U.S. history in elementary and secondary school and to define content and interpretive approaches to be used in creating assessment exercises for grades 4, 8, and 12.

Attributes of the 1994 History Assessment

In today's environment it is essential that we gather the highest quality information about how well children are learning history and how well they can apply what they have learned to realistic and challenging tasks. As in other assessments, this will be accomplished by incorporating both multiple-choice and open-ended questions with innovative assessment approaches.

Multiple-choice questions make up approximately half of the assessment. They include not only recall and comprehension questions but also a large proportion of questions that require higher level thinking skills. Open-ended questions concentrate on measuring students' depth of learning in U.S. history.

The test questions use a wide variety of written and graphic stimulus materials. Examples of these authentic historical materials include paintings, photos, maps, political cartoons, graphs, quotes, and excerpts from speeches and journals.

Students were asked to respond to these stimulus materials in a variety of ways:

- Short-answer responses might require lists, phrases, or sentences.
- Extended responses call upon students to generate more developed arguments, analyses, or explanations and may require the creation of nontextual components such as charts, maps, graphs, and timelines.

Special Study

A special study conducted for the 1994 U.S. History Assessment involved a pilot to measure history performance of student groups. This is especially relevant to students who, in the 21st century, should work collaboratively in groups to solve problems and make decisions in their jobs. Group tasks were specifically developed for a small national subsample of 8th graders. The group tasks were open-ended performance tasks with numerous hands-on activities to encourage group interaction and problem solving. Scoring criteria included ratings for history content, group process, and other dimensions.

Key Themes and Questions in U.S. History is just one in a series of brochures that describes NAEP assessments. Other titles in this series include *Preparing Citizens for the 21st Century—Geography: Learning About Our World*; *Looking at How Well Our Students Read*; *Measuring Essential Learning in Science*; and *Assessing Mathematics— Achieving Goals*. For further information on any of these publications, contact:

The National Assessment
Governing Board
800 North Capitol Street NW.
Suite 825
Washington, DC 20002–4233